

FWP Commission Agenda Item Cover Sheet

Meeting Date: July 12, 2012

Agenda Item: Proposed 2012 Early Migratory Bird Seasons

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Proposed Rule

Time for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

Migratory bird seasons have direct federal oversight and coordination, and seasons must be set within federal frameworks. Mourning doves and common snipe have fixed season dates (September 1-October 30 for doves, September 1-December 16 for snipe) and bag/possession limits from year to year, barring significant changes in dove population indices. The Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of sandhill cranes is annually monitored, with individual states' allowable harvest quotas based upon observed numbers and coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In Montana, crane numbers and hunter access have been used to set permit numbers for each of four areas (Dillon/Twin Bridges/Cardwell, Warm Springs area, Ovando-Helmville, Wheatland/Meagher/portion of Sweetgrass Counties). Crane harvest has consistently been well below allowable levels, with an estimate of 90 in 2011, compared to a harvest allocation of 250. Montana's RMP harvest allocation in 2012 is 238. Numbers of permits and hunters has been kept low in some areas due to limited hunter access. The remainder of the Central Flyway is under frameworks for mid-continent sandhill cranes.

The 2012 early migratory bird season proposals include an additional week of hunting for RMP sandhill cranes, relative to 2011. Season dates would change for mid-continent cranes due to calendar progression with no change in season length. Additionally, a permit quota is proposed for the new Broadwater County hunt area and there is a proposed adjustment to the 380-01 quota:

- Add one week to the RMP crane season. Proposed dates for RMP sandhill cranes (special drawn permits): September 8-September 30
- Season dates for mid-continent sandhill cranes: Sept. 29– Nov. 25
- Increase 380-01 (Dillon/Twin Bridges area) permits from 75 to 100
- New Broadwater County RMP crane hunting area (390-01) quota: 10 permits

Public Involvement Process & Results

Comments will be taken through 5 p.m., Monday, July 30, with final adoption on August 2. Comments were taken earlier on the additional hunting areas as part of the biennial season setting process.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission adopt these proposed adjustments to the 2012 early migratory seasons. This is consistent with known biology, management history and survey efforts to date. The proposed 2012 seasons are within the frameworks established by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Proposed Motion

I move to adopt the proposed 2012 early season migratory bird seasons as proposed by FWP.